

Trip Dossier for Guatemala & Belize – La Ruta Maya

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Experience the intense colours, vibrancy, cultures and landscapes of Central America as a family. Uncover the mysteries surrounding the ancient Mayan civilisation, venture deep into the jungle in Tikal National Park where the temples peek out of the tree canopy. Stroll around historic Antigua, caves, volcanoes, and take a boat trip on Lake Atitlán with its looming volcanoes. Enjoy walking through the colourful market of Chichicastenango. Take time to relax around the stunning Lake Atitlán, and enjoy your rainforest stay in an awarding winning Belize resort, with the option to choose from a range of activities from self-guided or guided mountain biking or walking through the jungle, to canoeing or visiting the Butterfly Farm to name a few activities. Then spend a few days chilling on the Belize Caribbean coast.

Day 1 Arrive Guatemala City and drive to Antigua (45 mins)

On arrival at Guatemala City Airport, you will be met and transferred to our hotel in Antigua approximately, 45 minutes away. The city of Antigua is amongst the oldest and most beautiful cities of the Americas. Located between three volcanoes Agua, Fuego and Acatenango - Fuego (Fire) is instantly recognisable often shrouded in a plume of smoke and with a distinctive red glow at night. Many of the magnificent buildings in the historic core were built in the 17th and 18th century, during the Spanish colonial era when it was the wealthy capital, and the city retains a wonderful elegant ambience. In 1979, UNESCO declared Antigua as a World Heritage site. The following day your guide will take you on a guided tour of this beautiful city. **2 nights - Hotel with swimming pool (breakfast)**

Day 2 Tour of colonial Antigua and visit to La Azotea Cultural Center

Following breakfast, your guide will meet you to take you on a guided tour of Antigua, visiting Central Park, the cathedral, San Francisco Church and enjoy a horse-drawn carriage ride through the streets where you can learn about the history and the ancient legends surrounding the ancient city guardians - Agua, Fuego and Acatenango volcanoes. From here we travel the short distance outside Antigua to visit La Azotea Cultural Center. La Azotea Cultural Center was established to preserve the vanishing customs, traditions and lifestyles of the native people of Guatemala. There are three museums full of information about the native Guatemalan people, including a coffee museum, where you can gain knowledge of how coffee is grown, harvested and processed. Casa K'ojom Museum, dedicated to Mayan music with an extensive collection of musical instruments on display dating back to pre-Columbian times to present day and discover how music plays a significant part in Mayan religious ceremonies and day-to-day life. The third museum is El Rincón de Sacatepéquez which features Mayan costumes and handicrafts of Sacatepéquez region. During your visit you can find out about weaving and candle making, market trading to getting an insight into wedding and funeral ceremonies. There is a restaurant at the centre and across the road La Ronda Equestrian Club. We return to the hotel late afternoon with time to relax or take a dip in the pool.

Day 3 Drive to Chichicastenango Market (2,030m); transfer to Panajachel on Lake Atitlan

This morning you'll say farewell to Antigua as you head into the Highlands to start the next part of your adventure. This is one of Guatemala's most beautiful regions with a lush greenness and a mixture of agricultural lands and woods. It is the heartland of the Mayan population of Guatemala and it is a clear contrast to Guatemala City with colourful dress in abundance, particularly if the locals are on their way to or from a market in one of the many small towns. This morning we head off to the colourful market of Chichicastenango (approx 2½ hours). Surrounded by valleys, with the nearby mountains looming overhead, Chichicastenango, with its cobbled narrow streets is often covered in a mist, which adds to its air of mystery and excitement. Enjoy wandering through the market with its wide range of vegetable stalls, and beautiful crafts: brightly coloured woven textiles, hammocks, traditional mask, jade and beaded jewellery, wooden objects and blown glass. Also, remember to be prepared to barter in the markets, this is an expected custom and is a fun way to interact with the local people. Chichi is also famous for its religious brotherhoods and if you get an opportunity to witness some of the ceremonies you will see a unique mixture of catholic and local styles. Late afternoon you will transfer to Panajachel, approximately a 1½ hour drive. Panajachel, is a popular resting place for visitors due to its ideal location on the shores of the stunningly beautiful Lake Atitlán. **3 nights - Hotel with swimming pool (breakfast)**

NB The order of visits in the Guatemalan Highlands differs from that originally shown in our 2010/11 brochure.

Day 4 Boat trip on Lake Atitlán and meet the locals

This morning enjoy a 30-minute boat ride on the tranquil Lake Atitlán. We also visit Santiago de Atitlán village where you can get a glimpse into Tzutujil Mayan life. Learn about the culture of the local people, including tales of shamanism, and religious ceremonies and if you are lucky, you may visit the village during one of the Saint's Days, which are celebrated with processions accompanied by drums, incense, ancient rites and brightly colourful costumes. Returning to the hotel in the afternoon and the rest of the day is at leisure.

Day 5 visit San Pedro Volcano (3,020m)

From Lake Atitlán, you have an incredible view of the three volcanoes: Tolimán, San Pedro and Atitlán that surround this expanse of azure blue – today you will visit one of them. Remember to wear sensible walking shoes, and take a bottle of water in your daypack, as you prepare to walk up the extinct San Pedro volcano, an elevation of 3,020m above sea level. San Pedro Volcano has a symmetrical cone with a small and deep crater, here you can enjoy superb views across the Lake Atitlan as you venture towards the rim, so do not forget your camera and binoculars. You'll return to Panajachel with free time to relax at the hotel or explore the touristy lakeside town with a number of restaurants and souvenir shops to wander around.

Day 6 Morning at leisure and afternoon flight to Flores

This morning is at leisure, take a stroll around the lake or spend it relaxing at the hotel. Around lunchtime we say goodbye to the Highlands and head back to Guatemala City Airport (3 hours) and take a short flight to Flores in the north-eastern El Peten district. The luggage limit is 22kg for hold luggage and 10kg for carry on luggage. Arrive early evening, and transfer to the hotel. Flores is situated on the island in the huge Lake Petén, linked by a 500m causeway to its sister town of Santa Elena and only a 45 minute drive to the impressive Tikal National Park. Flores has a number of good restaurants, please ask your guide for their recommendation for dinner that night, and many of the shops lining the cobbled-streets are open late in the evenings, displaying their wares of local handicrafts ranging from colourful woven fabrics and garments, wooden carvings and beaded jewellery. **2 nights - Hotel with swimming pool (breakfast)**

Day 7 Explore the jungle and temples of Tikal National Park (45mins drive)

Following an early breakfast, we head off towards the jungle and temples of Tikal National Park, one of the most famous, impressive, and yet still evocative, archaeological sites in the Americas. The region of El Petén is in the heart of the Mayan world, with more than 200 archaeological sites hidden amongst thick jungle canopy, where you may hear the squawk of parrots, the chatter of monkeys and the rustle of animals rummaging through the bush. Before venturing into the jungle to see the magnificent temples, you begin your adrenaline adventure tour above and below the treetops, which consists of a series of zip lines and hanging bridges, allowing you to observe the rainforest and its landscape from a different perspective.

The adventure continues as we uncover the mysteries surrounding the ancient Mayan civilisation, venturing deeper into the jungle in Tikal National Park to discover ancient Mayan temples peeking out of the green canopy – a real Indiana Jones experience. Built between 200BC and 1000 AD the classical period peaked around 550 AD when the city had a population of 100,000 people and the state ruled over the whole of Petén and beyond. Despite a late flourishing in the 9th century AD its downfall was fairly swift although the reasons for it, like that whole Mayan civilisation, remain mysterious. When the Spanish arrived it was not much more than a legend until 1848 when it was first rediscovered. Reaching the top of one of its ancient towers (up to 44m high) is an achievement by itself and the view across the treetops, to other similar stone summits, is superb. Listen out for the Howler monkeys, as the swing limb to limb through the jungle, and watch out for the brightly coloured parrots and toucans squawking and darting through the trees. Your guide will escort you through the jungle trails, that swamp most of this lost site, where you'll learn about this ancient civilisation and explore ruins of the Central Plaza, Northern and Central Acropolis, Temples I, II, III, IV, the Lost World Complex and Complexes N-Q-R. You will have some free time to wonder around the monuments and have lunch in the park.

Day 8 Drive to Cayo Creek, Belize (2 hr drive)

Following a hearty breakfast, it is time to pack up as your guide escorts you to the Belize border (1½ hr drive). At the border you will meet your Belize guide who will be your host for the next few days. From here it is only a 30-minute transfer to the Cayo District of Belize, your base. The resort is set in beautiful landscaped gardens, with a swimming pool, spa, beautifully furnished accommodation and the ideal base to explore the surrounding cultural, historical and eco-friendly adventures, from enjoying walks through the nature trails, mountain-biking, canoeing and horse-riding. **3 nights - Resort (breakfast)**

Day 9 Optional activities

Today is at leisure to explore as a family. Tours and excursions can be booked and paid for locally through the resort. These may include a visit to the Natural History Centre and Butterfly Farm, this is optional and included in your stay. Or you may choose an early morning bird walk with a naturalist guide, tour of the Rainforest Medicine

Trail at Ixchel Farm, and canoeing along the river. Alternatively, you may wish to venture further afield and hire mountain bikes, go horse-riding or take a canoeing excursion down the river to Barton Creek. The Barton Creek canoe excursion takes you along the river into the Xibalba (she-bal-ba) cave system, Mayan for 'underworld'. Here you can see magnificent stalactites, stalagmites, and listen to the guide as they explain how these caves were used in ancient Mayan civilisation for ceremonial purposes and burial site. You may combine this canoe trip with a half-day horse-riding, or a visit to the Butterfly Farm or a visit to Xunantunich ruins.

Day 10 Cave tubing (40 mins); fly to Ambergris Caye, enjoy the beaches

Today we head off from the resort to Jaguar Paw, a journey taking approximately 40 minutes. On arrival we take a short hike through the jungle upriver to the 'put-in-point' where armed with a life-jacket and inner tube you walk to the rivers edge where your unforgettable adventure begins, floating gently down the river, enjoy fabulous views of the rainforest and feel the eerie chill as you float through cave systems. The guide will have a small dry-bag for cameras and wallets, but please only take the minimal personal items with you. Lunch and soft drinks are included in this tour.

Day 11 Fly to San Pedro Ambergris (journey time 2+hrs)

This morning is at leisure and in the afternoon, you'll be transferred to Belize Municipal Airport (1½ hr drive) for the short – 15 minute flight to San Pedro Ambergris. On arrival at the airport, you'll be taken to your delightful hotel, located on the stunning island of Ambergris Caye, overlooking the sandy palm-fringed beach (caye means island in Belize and is pronounced key). The cayes, generally very low rise & very laid back islands, stretch along Belize's barrier reef which at 290 km is the longest in the Western Hemisphere. The rest of the day is at leisure to relax, take a walk along the beach and play in the sea. **2 nights Hotel (breakfast)**

Day 12 Optional half-day snorkelling at Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley Tour

Today is at leisure but we recommend you go on the optional half-day tour to Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley departing at 09.00hrs from the hotel. Snorkelling equipment is provided. Hol Chan, Mayan for 'little channel' is Belize's oldest marine reserve and was established as a community-based initiative to prevent the high level and uncontrolled destructive nature of fishing and diving in the area. It is now a government-protected reserve. The reserve covers an area of approximately 3 sq. miles (7.8sq km) and has an interlinked system of coral reef, sea grass, mangrove habitats leading to the fourth zone – Shark Ray Alley, where you may see Nurse Sharks and Southern Sting Rays. Enjoy the experience of snorkelling through this awe-inspiring underwater world and look out for numerous aquatic species from parrotfish and angelfish, to turtles, dolphins, sharks and stingrays. This is not a private tour and there will be other international visitors on the transfers and on the excursion.

Day 13 Depart; fly to London

Sadly, it is time to depart and leave behind the beautiful Belize shores. Your driver will meet you at the hotel and take the short flight from San Pedro Ambergris to Belize International Airport. On arrival at Belize International Airport, please collect your luggage and proceed to check-in for your international flight home. Overnight flight.

Day 14 Arrive London

This itinerary includes our group flights from London. If you are making other flight arrangements, please refer to your Confirmation Invoice and Joining Instructions for details of the start or end of the trip. Please remember international flights and trip dates do occasionally change, so please always purchase flexible tickets.

Each itinerary is planned many months in advance and although it is our intention to operate the itinerary as printed in the brochure and detailed here, it may be necessary to make some changes as a result of alterations to flight schedules, climatic conditions, limitations of infrastructure or other operational factors which are beyond our control. As a consequence, the order or location of overnight stops may vary from those outlined but we will always endeavour to keep you informed of any such changes. Included meals are indicated in the daily itinerary.

Optional Extras

These excursions, if available, can be arranged through your tour leader (approx. per person cost shown below)



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Visit to Natural History Centre & the Butterfly Farm	Included
Barton Creek Canoe Excursion with a visit to the Butterfly Farm (minimum 3 pax)	US\$ 111
Barton Creek Canoe Excursion and half a day horse riding (minimum 3 pax)	US\$ 207
Xunantunich and Barton Creek Canoe Excursion (minimum 3 pax)	US\$ 143
Visit to the Crooked Tree Reserve and Baboon Sanctuary (minimum 3 pax)	US\$ 158
Horse-riding with lunch in Belize (minimum 3 pax)	US\$ 195
Belize Zoo and Baboon Sanctuary (minimum 3 pax)	US\$ 158
Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley tour – per person	US\$ 45

Is this right for your family? A great combination of discovery, nature, learning and time for relaxation. This is pretty active from visiting Antigua and the highlands to the jungles of Tikal NP and crossing the border from Guatemala to Belize. To keep driving time to a minimum we included flights. You'll be staying in a range of accommodation from comfortable hotels to luxurious resorts.

Lone Parents Single parents or other adults travelling alone with children should be aware that some countries, including the UK, require documentation confirming that the individual has authority to travel with the minor. It is crucial that you contact the relevant country embassy for further information on exactly what may be required. These details can be found on the Foreign & Commonwealth Website under the appropriate country www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Accommodation The hotels and lodges are generally very good - at least 3 star standard. All hotels have private facilities and are on a twin share basis - most of them are air-conditioned. In Belize you spend three nights at a luxury resort where you have an option of a range of optional excursions to choose from and two nights at the end of your holiday on the Caribbean coast of Ambergris Caye. Many hotels have swimming pools. All hotels are modern, clean comfortable and offer a friendly service. The mention of a swimming pool at a hotel should not be taken as a guarantee but rather an indication. You should also be aware that swimming pools at the hotels are often unheated and so can be cold in the winter months or even closed.

Climate

Guatemala has a Pacific and Caribbean coast it has a tropical Caribbean climate, namely hot, humid and wet between May to October, with rainfall tending to fall in the afternoon and evenings and temperatures ranging from the mid to high 20's for most of the year. Guatemala's climate varies according to the altitude. The coastal regions and the northeast are hot throughout the year, but with clear night skies the temperatures drop sharply at night.

The average monthly climate in Guatemala City:

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Max °C	23	25	27	28	29	27	26	26	26	24	23	22
Min °C	12	12	14	14	16	16	16	16	16	16	14	13
Rainfall (mm)	8	3	13	31	152	274	203	198	231	173	23	8

Belize is located on the Caribbean Sea and has a subtropical climate, with a brisk prevailing wind from the Caribbean Sea. High annual temperatures and humidity. The dry season starts from January to April and the rainy season from June. Although not always affected the hurricane season is from June to the end of November.

The average monthly climate in Belize City:

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Max °C	27	28	29	30	31	31	31	31	31	30	28	27
Min °C	19	21	22	23	24	24	24	24	23	22	20	20
Rainfall (mm)	137	61	38	56	109	196	163	170	244	305	226	185

Food and Drink Meals included as per itinerary. Please remember to drink plenty of bottled water during your trip, do not drink tap water. Food in Guatemala and Belize is a range of Latin American food (rice and refried beans, tacos, corn tortillas, chicken, fish, chilli, fruit, plantain, chocolate and lots of great coffee!), American, Mexican, Creole, Chinese and international dishes.



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Local Costs

A small bottle of mineral water (500ml)	US\$ 2.00
A large bottle of mineral water (1 litre)	US\$ 5.00
A can of coke (soft drinks)	US\$ 2.00
A carton or bottle of fruit juice	US\$ 3.00
A bottle of beer	US\$ 3.00
A light lunch time snack – sandwich for example	US\$ 6.00
A two course meal* - excluding drinks	US\$12.00
A three course meal* - excluding drinks	US\$ 20.00

*Based on a mid range tourist restaurant.

Currency The unit of currency in Guatemala is the Quetzal (GTQ or Q) named after the national bird of Guatemala. At the time of writing UK£1 = GTQ 13.83 and US\$1 = GTQ 8.28 (Nov 2009). There are a number of banks with ATMs in the main cities where you can obtain cash, US dollars are widely accepted in the tourist parts and can be exchanged in banks or hotel bureau de change. We do recommend you carry local currency as well. Credit cards Visa, Mastercard and American Express are accepted in most places, but there may be a 5+% surcharge.

In Belize, the unit of currency is the Belize Dollar (BZD or BZ\$). At the time of writing UK£1 = BZ\$ 3.29 and US\$1 = BZ\$1.97 (Nov 2009). US Dollars and US Dollar traveller cheques are also accepted, though change is usually in Belizean dollars. It is difficult to exchange other currencies in Belize. Belizean ATM's do not accept foreign (British) credit cards, therefore we recommend that you change money at the border or your hotel.

Tipping is a recognised part of life and although at your discretion you will be expected to reward service. It should be remembered, however, that over-generosity could lead to jealousy in poor countries. Please remember that all tips should be a way for individuals to thank staff for good service. Most restaurants charge 10 - 15% service charge.

Please also remember that your tour leader works hard and for long hours to make your holiday run smoothly, a suitable reward for good service would be £1-£2 from each person, per day. It is usual to collect this between yourselves as a group and present it to the leader on completion of the tour.

Security Whilst the vast majority of travellers never experience anything untoward it is worth taking precautions particularly in urban areas. You should take sensible precautions in crowded areas such as street markets and airports, where pick-pocketing is common, and keep clear of any street disturbances. Don't wear expensive jewellery, never leave your bags unattended, keep large amounts of money, cameras and mobile phones out of sight when walking in town centres, and avoid walking in city centres after dark. Keep copies of important documents, including passports, in a separate place to the documents themselves, together with details of credit cards. Leave copies at home with a friend too. Safeguard valuables, important documents and cash and deposit them in hotel safes, where practicable.

Language The official language in Guatemala is Spanish, although English is widely spoken in tourist areas. In Belize it is English although the accent is very strong and a Caribbean Creole is in widespread use!

Time Guatemala and Belize is GMT -6 hours. Central Standard Time Zone and they do not observe daylight saving time.

Departure tax:

In Guatemala, the land departure tax is US\$10 per person, payable in cash US dollars.

In Belize, the departure tax is a US\$30 per person and is payable on leaving Belize, in cash US dollars or US Dollar travellers cheques. You cannot pay with credit cards.

Passports and visas

British nationals do not require a visa to enter Belize and can stay as visitors for up to three months. Passports should have a validity of more than six months from the date of entry.

If you are travelling via the U.S. please see the separate US Visa Waiver information sheet.

USA Visa Waiver (if travelling via the USA)

From 12 January 2009, the USA government has enforced changes to its visa-waiver programme meaning travellers will be required to apply for authorisation to travel under the scheme before arriving at the airport. This

will affect all passport holders from the 34 countries currently participating in the visa-waiver scheme, including UK passport holders.

Travellers will be required to obtain authorisation (known as ESTA) before arriving at the airport and can apply online at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> or via Manage My Booking on ba.com

The application process may take up to approximately 15-20 minutes and authorisation is normally granted immediately but may take up to 72 hours. We recommend that your customers apply for authorisation at the time of booking or at least 72 hours before their flight to ensure that they are able to travel. Customers making late bookings can still apply, but there is a risk that they may not receive immediate confirmation.

Once granted, authorisation is valid for two years. Travellers do not need to have firm plans to travel to apply for authorisation.

This requirement for approved authorisation is in addition to the requirement for all customers to submit APIS data.

Until further notice, travellers will still need to complete the green I-94W non-immigrant visa waiver form onboard their flight.

ESTA approval will also be required for passengers transiting US from 12 January 2009.

It is the responsibility of the traveller to complete the ESTA application and obtain authorization. However, there may be some circumstances in which this may not be possible. If this is the case, your customer may grant permission for a third party to complete the ESTA form on their behalf. It is at their risk. If the information provided is not correct, they may not be able to travel.

Travellers with a resident permit 'green card' or travelling on a visa will not need to apply for authorisation, as they are not travelling under the visa-waiver programme. For more information, go to www.ba.com/batrade.com, <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> or <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/>

Clothing & Equipment List for La Ruta Maya

In general pack light-weight, loose fitting and comfortable clothing plus some warmer windproof items for cooler mornings/evenings at altitude. Light-weight cotton clothing is recommended in this climate with a wrap or sweater for the cooler evenings.

Guatemala is Catholic, so please dress conservatively especially to avoid running the risk of offending and attracting unwanted attention. Men should never go shirtless and ladies to dress appropriately. The cayes in Belize are usually very laidback with shoes an optional item of clothing.

We recommend you pack a few essential clothing items and toiletries in your hand luggage, just in case...

CLOTHING	NUMBER PER PERSON	Check	EQUIPMENT	Check
Walking Shoes	1 pair (optional)		Soft-sided bag 50 – 80litres	
Trainers or Strong Sandals	1 pair – all purpose wear		Lightweight Daypack – 25 litres	
Waterproof Jacket	1 lightweight		Sunglasses	
T-Shirts	3 +		Personal First Aid Kit	
Long Trousers or Skirt	2 +		Sunscreen – lots of it	
Short Trousers / shorts	2		Insect Repellent with high DEET content	
Long Sleeve Shirt	2 +		Torch and Batteries	
Sunhat / Baseball cap	Essential (styled to shade face, ears and neck)		Camera and Accessories	
Warm jacket	1		Towel or Sarong	
Fleece or Sweatshirt	2		Wash Kit	
Swim Wear	1		Small loo kit (tissues and dry anti-bacterial hand wash)	



ITEM	Check	ITEM	Check
Passport/ Visa		Universal travelling adapter	
Air Tickets		Binoculars	
Money / Credit Cards		Money Security Belt/Pouch	
Insurance Documents			
Trip Information and Itinerary			

For details regarding **hand luggage restrictions** please visit www.baa.com